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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000019

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: NINEWA PRT: CHRISTIANS WARY ABOUT PERSISTENT  
ATTACKS

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Classified By: PRT Ninewa Acting Leader Mark Schapiro for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

11. (U) This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

12. (C) SUMMARY: Attacks on northern Iraq's Christian community in recent weeks, although comparatively unspectacular, have left the beleaguered minority population wary ahead of the national election. Widespread Iraqi and Western media coverage of four attacks on Christian churches in Ninewa since November 26 masks the reality that these attacks were isolated and relatively unsophisticated. In an unrelated incident, a short burst of politicized violence between Christians and Shabaks in the ethnically-mixed town of Bartalla quickly ebbed after local officials appealed for the two minority populations to refrain from violence. Violence against Christians in Ninewa is likely to continue to simmer until the national election, as violent extremists choose to focus on a vulnerable non-Muslim minority well-covered by the media and viewed as having an exceptional relationship with the United States. END SUMMARY. Unsophisticated and Unorganized, but Widely Reported

13. (C) To date, the recent attacks against Christians appear to be isolated and relatively unsophisticated, yielding limited results beyond garnering media attention. The current spate of attacks against Christians in Ninewa began with two simultaneous improvised explosive device (IED) attacks on Catholic churches in Mosul on November 26. Neither attack resulted in injuries, but one attack caused extensive damage to an unoccupied church in downtown Mosul. Another IED attack targeting the exterior of a church in Mosul on December 15 resulted in minor casualties, while a multiple IED and vehicle borne IED (VBIED) attack targeting a busy traffic circle on the same day in Mosul resulted in some damage to a church and a Christian School. Although the attack caused injuries to students and staff at the school, it appears terrorists were targeting first-responders who arrived to help with the original blast at the traffic circle, with the church and school serving as convenient secondary targets. (Note: USF discovered and recovered two other IED's in the vicinity, also targeting first-responders to the first blast. End Note.) Separately, another pushcart IED on December 23 outside Mosul, s St. Thomas Church, substantially damaged in a previous attack over a year ago, resulted in at least one death and several injured civilians. According to U.S. military sources, the explosives employed in the attacks were of relatively low quality, suggesting alack of sophistication.

Shi'a and Christian Tempers FLASH

14. (C) In an unrelated series of events, Christian and Shabak residents in the ethnically-mixed town of Bartalla, straddling the disputed Peshmerga boundary in eastern Ninewa, briefly took up arms against one another on December 25. (Note: Many Shabaks practice a variant of Shi'ism. End note.) In recent months, the two minority populations, already somewhat mistrustful of one another, found their

relationship further strained when Shabak residents discovered some of their Ashura banners torn down near Bartalla's main church. Rumor quickly attributed the defacing to local Christians, while prominent Bartalla Christian political leader George Kako told us on December 27 that he believed the incident was provoked by Shabak leaders in order to demonstrate the weaknesses and shortcomings of Kurdish control. As Shabak residents gathered in protest near the church in Bartalla, private Christian guards fired on the Shabak crowd. The Shabak then returned fire. On the Shabak crowd. The Shabak then returned fire. Peshmerga forces quickly arrived on the scene to stem the violence. The same day, pleas by local Shabak and Christian leaders, and personal appearances by the Provincial Governor and the Commander of the Ninewa Operations Command appear to have calmed the populations, at least for the time being. The Governor to the Rescue

15. (C) In the face of negative press reports of attacks on Christians in Ninewa and continuing attention on violence aimed at minorities in the province ahead of the national election, Governor Atheel al-Nujaifi immediately injected himself into the situation. With a keen eye on the prospects of his al-Hadba Gathering in the national election, Nujaifi has pledged additional personnel and security measures to protect Ninewa's Christian community. He also announced the formation of a special committee of inquiry to look into the events in Bartalla. Kako told us that Bartalla had plenty of Iraqi Police and Army on the streets, both before and after the incident, although the numbers had increased in its aftermath. For their part, Christian leaders in Mosul tell us they remain resilient but continue to feel the world does not appreciate their claim to be the "original" inhabitants of Ninewa.

16. (C) COMMENT: Attacks against Christians in Ninewa have thus far suggested an unsophisticated enemy, but U.S. military reporting underscores the intention of known violent extremists in the province to continue targeting the

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beleaguered Christian community to sow further mistrust in advance of the national election. The Christians of Ninewa, comprising Assyrians and Chaldeans, continue to look to the U.S. to provide better security and economic opportunity for their communities. Until the election, widespread media coverage of attacks on Christians and the continued perception of the Christian community's exceptional relationship with the United States will continue to make them an appealing target in northern Iraq. End comment.  
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